

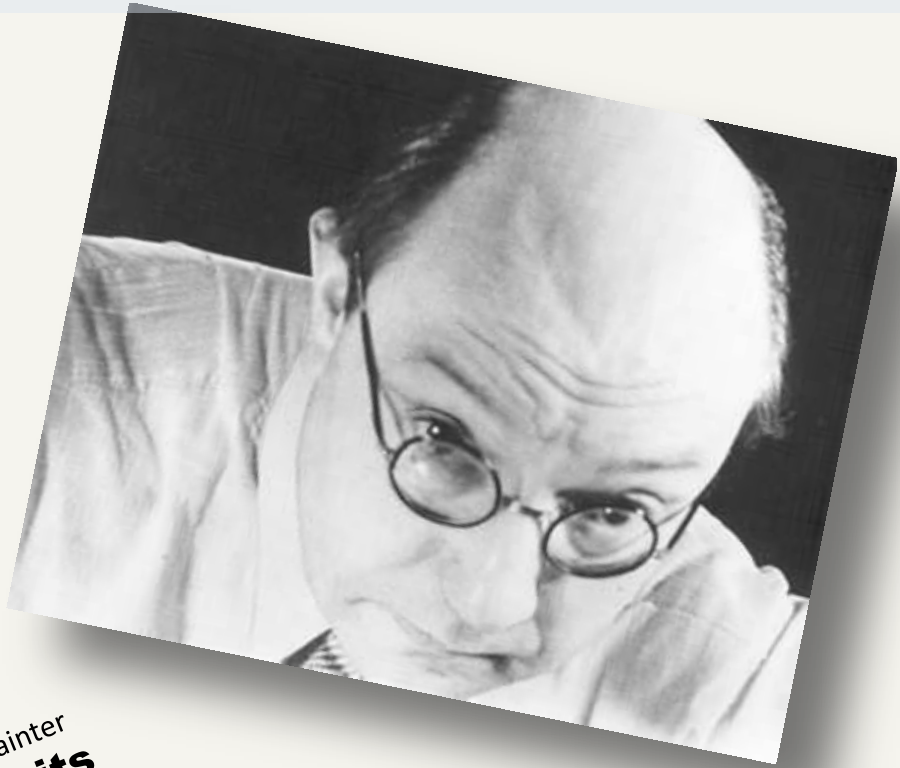
## Mini Lessons on Minor Masters



# frits van den Berghe

An EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE by PEDRO de la MONTAÑA

# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Painter  
**Frits  
van  
den  
Berghe**  
(1883-1939).  
Bijtebier negative,  
unknown date  
(B220879)

**EXPRESSIONIST**  
Frits was a Flemish

# How does one define **EXPRESSIONISM?**

## **a workable definition would be**

the search for **expressiveness of style** by means of **exaggerations and distortions** of line and color; a deliberate rejection of the naturalism implicit in Impressionism in favor of a simplified style which should carry far greater **emotional impact** in this general sense of **emotional force**. Expressionism is a feature of non-Mediterranean art in general, Grunewald being the standard example. In the more limited context of modern art, the Expressionist movement may be said to spring from van Gogh's use of **drastically simplified outline and very strong color**. In France this has clear affinities with Fauvism, but the principal exponents, apart from Toulouse-lautrec, were mostly German (or at least Nordic, like the Norwegian Munch, whose hysterical art is one of the foundations of the movement). The tendency to a sentimental hysteria and the clear derivation from Negro Art are two of the factors, which explain Hitlers denunciation of "Degenerate Art" and the esteem it now enjoys. The Bruke and the Blaue Reiter are **two of the principal sub-groups**, while some of the major individual artist are Beckman, Ensor, Nolde, Kokoschka, Rouault, and Soutine. The nature of their subject-matter and the emphasis placed on outline are two reasons for the important part played by Expressionist graphic art.

# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST

**He was born in the city of Ghent** mainly known to the english speaking world as the site of the signing of the **Treaty of Ghent** which formally ended the War of 1812 between Britain and the United States.



The Graslei is one of the most scenic places in Ghent's old city centre. The bridge to the right is the *Sint-Michielsbrug*, the building on the corner is the former postal office and in the distance to the right the three towers of Ghent can be seen.

**van den Berghe's date of birth is 3 April 1883**

***Events that were shaping his world that year were:***

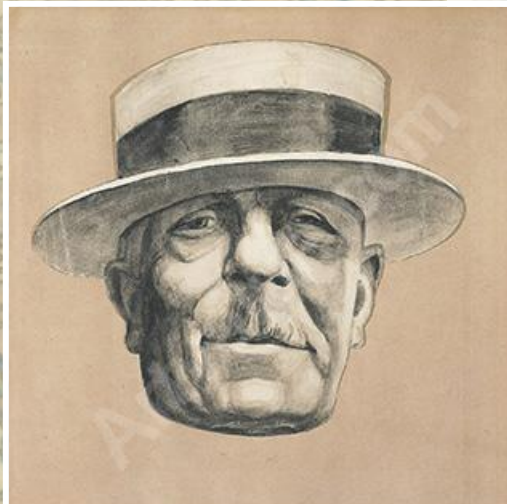
- The birth of Walter Gropius, German-American architect .
- The death of French artist Gustave Doré.
- The death of French artist Edouard Manet.
- The birth of French artist Maurice Utrillo.
- First skyscraper 10 stories is built in Chicago.
- Orient Express-Paris-Istanbul makes its first run.
- English scientist Sir Joseph Swan produces a syntheric fiber.
- Nietzsche publishes "Thus Spake Zarathustra".
- The death of philosopher Karl Marx.
- The French gain control of Tunis.
- Metropolitan Opera House in New York opens.
- British scientist Lord Kelvin publishes "On the Size of Atoms".
- The birth of French politician Pierre Laval.



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Distances - 1935



Portrait of George Minne van Baron.  
Charcoal and chalk on paper.

Frits van den Berghe's father, Raphael, was a well respected secretary of the Ghent University, and well known for his erudition.

Although Frits van den Berghe was Flemish historians includes him among the Dutch Expressionist. The only exception being Flemish historians.

In 1898 young Frederick (everyone called him Frits) entered the Ghent Academy of Fine Arts. Two of his classmates, Leon De Smet and Alberts Servaes, will one day also make their own place in the Dutch art world of expressionism. In 1902 van de Berghe and Alberts Servaes share a studio on the Rue House Grate. That same year there is some evidence to indicate that he moved to Sint-Martens-Latem with his close friend Robert Aereus. In 1904 Servaes joined them. Van de Berghe's was accustomed to spend the summer months in the village and the winter in Ghent. In 1908 he established residence in the village and was appointed lecturer at the academy. At this time he met Paul Gustave van Hecke and André de Ridder who became a lifelong friends.

Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, van den Berghe suffered an existential crisis. With a friend he traveled to the United States but disillusioned he returned after several months.

With the outbreak of war Frits and De Smet flee to the Netherlands where he met and was helped by the Dutch painter Leo Gestel. Soon he was followed by his friend Andre De Ridder. The Amsterdam art world was quick to notice the arrival of these two talented men.

In 1915 the Larensche Kunsthandel gallery showed interest in their work. In 1916 they had their first major exhibition of their work on foreign soil which was extensive. The lure of Amsterdam could not tempt them away from Sint-Martens-Latem even though he was included in an exhibition of Belgian exiles in Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Later many Belgian exiles came together as part of 'the Gooi group, a small colony of artists who called themselves "Gent in exile"'.



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST

**Frits van den Berghe** was one of the most interesting Belgian expressionists in the first part of the twentieth century. He started his career at the turn of the century under influence of the Symbolist and Luminist artists who were grouped in Sint-Martens-Latem.

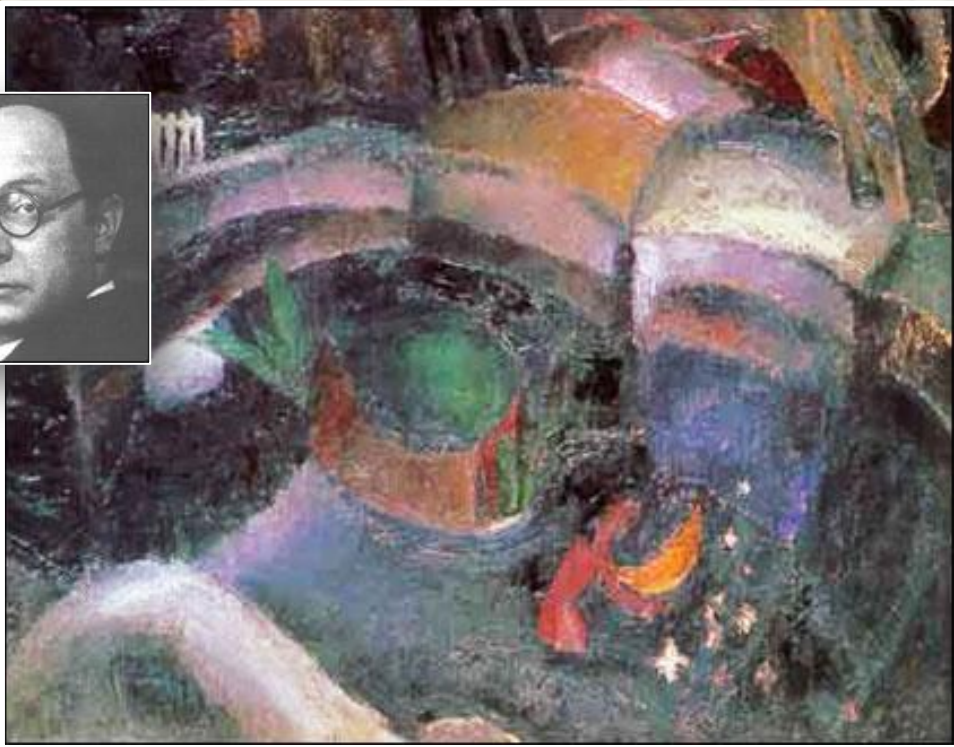
Soon afterwards, around 1908, he wrote a manifesto together with his friend and fellow artist Gustave De Smet opposing Impressionism à la Claus. Emile Claus belonged to the late-impressionist school of painting. During the First World War, Frits lived in the Netherlands, a period of self doubt which slowed down his pictorial activity. Nevertheless the Cubism of the French artist Henri Le Fauconnier as well the Futurist movement were a revelation for him. The magazine *Das Kunstblatt*, to which Gustave De Smet had subscribed, opened the door for Van den Berghe to the German Expressionist movement.

On his return in 1922 the art critics and dealers P.G. van Hecke and André de Ridder were of overriding importance for his first break through to the gallery *Sélection* and in 1926 to the gallery *Le Centaure*. The international allure of *Le Centaure*, which exhibited the works of Lhote, Leger, Arp, Klee, Foujita, Zadkine, Miro and Ernst, encouraged Van den Berghe's surrealist development. The Max Ernst exhibition at Le Centaure in 1927 had a great impact on him and from that moment on, he tried to detach himself from traditional painting. His work took on a more fantastic quality in the tradition of James Ensor and Hieronymus Bosch





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



*Vissend naar de sterren, olieverf op doek, 1926*  
Fishing for stars, oil on canvas, 1926

The *star fisher* is a striking example of the personal synthesis between different influences. The metaphysical layers and the visionary power of Van den Berghe's work - so characteristic of his oeuvre are often expressed, as here, in poetic images that remain intriguing. In the stillness of the dark we see reflected in the water the reflection of stars against a nude fisherman. The moonlight creates a dreamy, almost unreal atmosphere. Van den Berghe rarely gave explanations of his work, which makes interpretation difficult if not impossible. The seemingly senseless act of fishing contrasts with stars that symbolizes the utopian desire for the absolute.

Blaricum 1919  
Frits van den Berghe in  
his studio.





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Frits Van Den Berghe was also active in the comics field. From 1931 to 1933, he made illustrations for weekly stories in the Vooruit daily from Ghent. From 1935 until his death, he was a staff artist for the magazine, doing hundreds of illustrations, caricatures and portraits. He also did a comic called 'Album van Pierken', published in local dialect written by the Flemish poet-journalist Richard Minne.

In Voor Allen, he did a weekly cartoon with the character 'Jan van Plan'. He did several comics for the Belgian comics weekly Bravo from 1936, starting with 'Pikkel en Duim'. He also did five comics with John Flanders's 'Edmund Bell' character: 'De Man met het Witte Aangezicht', 'De IJzeren Tempel', 'Het Geheim van Hawk-Manor', 'Het Mysterie van de Witte Tijger', and 'Mysteras'. After his death, Van den Berghe's running serials were continued by his pupil Leo de Budt.





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Gust. De Smet en Frits Van den Berghe in de galerie Heystee, Smit en co. te Amsterdam.



I-r Frits Van den Berghe, Paul-Gustave Van Hecke, Gustave De Smet en André De Ridder.



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



## Frits' friends and Artistic influences

### Leon de Smet

De Smet was a Flemish painter and the younger brother of painter Gustave de Smet (1877-1943), also a renowned painter. He was born in Ghent, Belgium, in 1881. He received his artistic training at the Royal Academy of Art. Together with his brother, he belonged to the so-called Sint-Martens-Latem painters, a group of artists who were active around the area of the same name. De Smet's style is characterised by an impressionistic and pointilistic touch. Typical is his manner of building up a composition with swift, short brushstrokes, and undertone colors. However, always in a balanced way. In 1914, when the First World War started, De Smet moved to Great Britain, which brought him fame and fortune. In 1917 an individual solo exhibition was organised in the Leicester Gallery in London. Three years later he returned to Belgium, where a large exhibition devoted to his work was held in the Galerie Georges Giroux in Brussels. At the age of 72, in 1953, the prestigious Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent honoured him with a huge solo exhibition.





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



## Frits' friends and Artistic influences

### Albert Servaes

(4 April 1883 – 19 April 1966) was a Belgian expressionist painter. He was part of the first Latem school of painting which focused on Mystical Realism, but became a founder of Belgian expressionism later in life. He became known for his religious works, typically showing the suffering of Jesus Christ, which stirred controversy in the Roman Catholic Church. He also gained fame for his expressionist landscapes.





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



## Frits' friends and Artistic influences

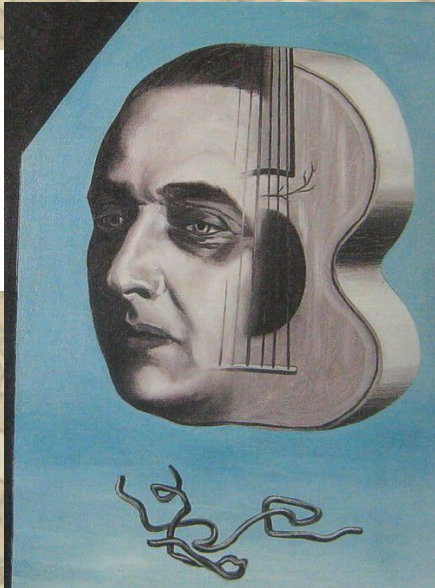
### Leo Gestel

(born in Woerden, 22 Nov 1881; died in Hilversum, 26 Nov 1941). Dutch painter and draughtsman. As the son of the director of an art school, he trained first as an art teacher at the Rijksnormaalschool, Amsterdam, with evening classes at the Rijksacademie (1900–03), before becoming an artist. For several years he managed to earn a living by illustrating books, by contributing drawings to newspapers and by designing advertising leaflets for his uncle Dimmen Gestel, an artist and printer who had painted outdoors with van Gogh. His friends called him Leonardo, a nickname that he adopted in a shortened form. For a short period Gestel's development ran parallel to that of his former classmate Jan Sluijters. Gestel's work, like Sluijters's, is characterized by a variety of styles including a form of Divisionism, seen in Autumn Tree (1911; The Hague, Gemeentemus.), Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism. On the whole, however, Gestel's paintings are more deliberate in style and spiritual in content. He was one of the leading figures of the avant-garde in 1909 with Piet Mondrian and Sluijters, and in 1911 he was among the most important Dutch representatives at the first international exhibition of the Moderne Kunstkring, from which two of his nudes were excluded, but his role was less outspoken than that of Sluijters.





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Portrait of Paul-Gustave Van Hecke  
by Rene Magritte

## Frits' friends and Artistic influences



**Paul-Gustave van Hecke** polymath and friend, was in his role as art critic the driving force behind the magazine *Variétés* and the gallery *L'Epoque* which set the tone and style for the surrealism for the Flemish art world. The purpose of the gallery, founded in October of 1927, was to defend and promote expressionist and surrealist painting. The magazine *Variétés*, with its fancy style and glossy paper debuted in May of 1928. The newest fashion, cinema, photography, dance and urban news were discussed and gave *Variétés* a very modern and eclectic touch. Van Hecke was the director of the magazine and the editors were Albert Valentin, who had been accepted for a while in the Parisian surrealist group, the literary critic Denis Marion and, again, Mesens. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that a lot of surrealists published their texts or pictures in *Variétés* and that the newest surrealist publications were discussed in the magazine. In June 1929, a special publication of *Variétés*, called 'Surrealism in 1929' was even edited by André Breton and Louis Aragon themselves.

*Variétés* certainly had some features in common with surrealism because of its anti-bourgeoisie and its anti-Catholicism, its predilection for the fantastic and the irrational and its desire to shock. In particular the use of images in strange juxtapositions could be regarded as surrealist. But still, *Variétés* cannot be labelled as a surrealist magazine. Two tendencies characterised the art magazine. Firstly, *Variétés* was preoccupied with surrealism and secondly, it was an art magazine from the North, permeated by a typical Northern sensibility which differed from the Latin one. *Variétés* was happy to quote for example the French writer Pierre Mac Orlan who had argued that Latin clarity veiled the eye, in opposition to the Flemish imaginative mysticism and went on to declare: 'I am Flemish!' Also, the gallery *L'Epoque* was not univocally orientated towards surrealism and mixed expressionism, and, more in particular, Flemish expressionism, with surrealism.



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



## Frits' friends and Artistic influences

### André de Ridder

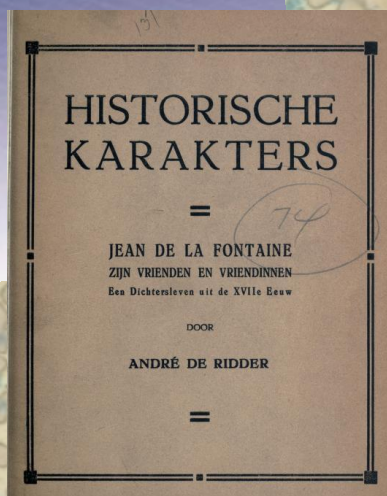
was born in Antwerp on October 20, 1888.

He studied at the Commercial College in Antwerp. Later he became professor of statistics at Ghent and Antwerp.

He edited the magazines "Flemish Labour" and "The Flemish Guide". He also founded two other magazines "The Orchard" and "The Red Sail". He achieved fame for his studies on "Stijn Streuvels" and "Hugo Verriest," both released in 1908.

In his novels he depicted life in the big city wanting to counter act the success of the Flemish "peasant novels". He was an extremely versatile man of letters, one the first in Flanders, especially in the manner he practiced the literary interview. He was a friend and supporter of many artist, a life long friend of Frits, and an ardent admirer of expressionist painting.

André De Ridder died in Borgerhout on July 1, 1961.





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



## Frits' friends and Artistic influences

### Robert Aereens

Born in Ghent (1883 -? - 1969)

Aereens was a Belgian Expressionist painter and watercolorist of landscapes, still lifes and portraits. He had close ties the group of Sint-Martens-Latem. His training began at the Academy of Ghent, after which he attended the class of Jean Delvin. In 1902 he stettled in Afsnee where he met Frits van den Berghe. His early influences included the work of Emile Claus. In 1924 he became a teacher at the Academy in ghent. During the First World War he created some works while at the front. In 1916 he settled in paris and exhibited at the Salon des Armees. He also participated in the Salon of Ghent in 1933 showing "Fair of Vezelay" and "interior. For the buffet." In the 1937 Salon he exhibited "the kitchen", "Portrait" and "The Workshop".





# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST

## Frits' friends and artistic influences.



### Jozef Cantré

**Gent - 1890-1957** was a sculptor who was influenced by van den Berghe

The Apple Plaque in bronze 60 x50 cm

Made in 1929

Signed on the bottom right: *Cantré*

This plaque was made in the Netherlands where he resided after World War I. He had still contact with his friends Gustave DeSmet and Frits van den Berghe who inspired this work of a family intimately depicted.

A nice example of the expressionistic Belgian style. A fine example of the beauty sculpture strives to be.



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST

## His Artistic Credo

It would seem he wrote this after the few months he spent in America even though he mentions he has not traveled. It appears to be written for an exhibition catalogue. I have only this fragment and not the original source.

**“I wasted a great deal of time in attempting to reconcile what I had to say with visually perceptible form and color. For years I could not complete a single canvas I undertook. I have not traveled.**

**It was only thanks to the war that I came to know Gauguin and van Gogh. When at last I was able to render more or less well what I could see with my eyes, I realized that that could not be my only aim in painting. The forms and colors I desired were never those I could see with my eyes, and I learned to mistrust my eyes. I came to understand that I had first to separate my own vision from life, before I could organize color and form. None of the various contemporary currents affected me for the simple reason that I saw them all as one-sided reactions from a preceding period, each current constituting a facet of contemporary effort, and nothing more.”**





**FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST**

**GALLERY**



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Kunstmuseum aan Zee - Eeuwige zwerver, vagebond  
Museum of Fine Arts - Eternal wanderer, vagabond



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Kunstmuseum aan Zee - Vruchtbaarheid  
Museum of Fine Arts - Fertility



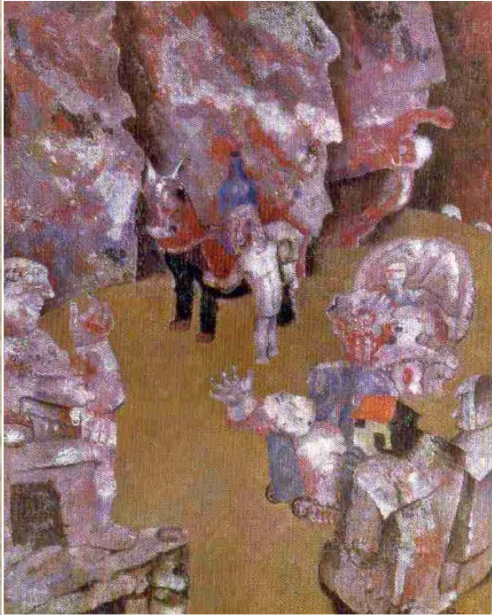
# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Bloemen over de stad (Fleurs sur la ville)  
Flowers around the city



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



De ongekennde tempel - 1929  
The unprecedented temple - 1929



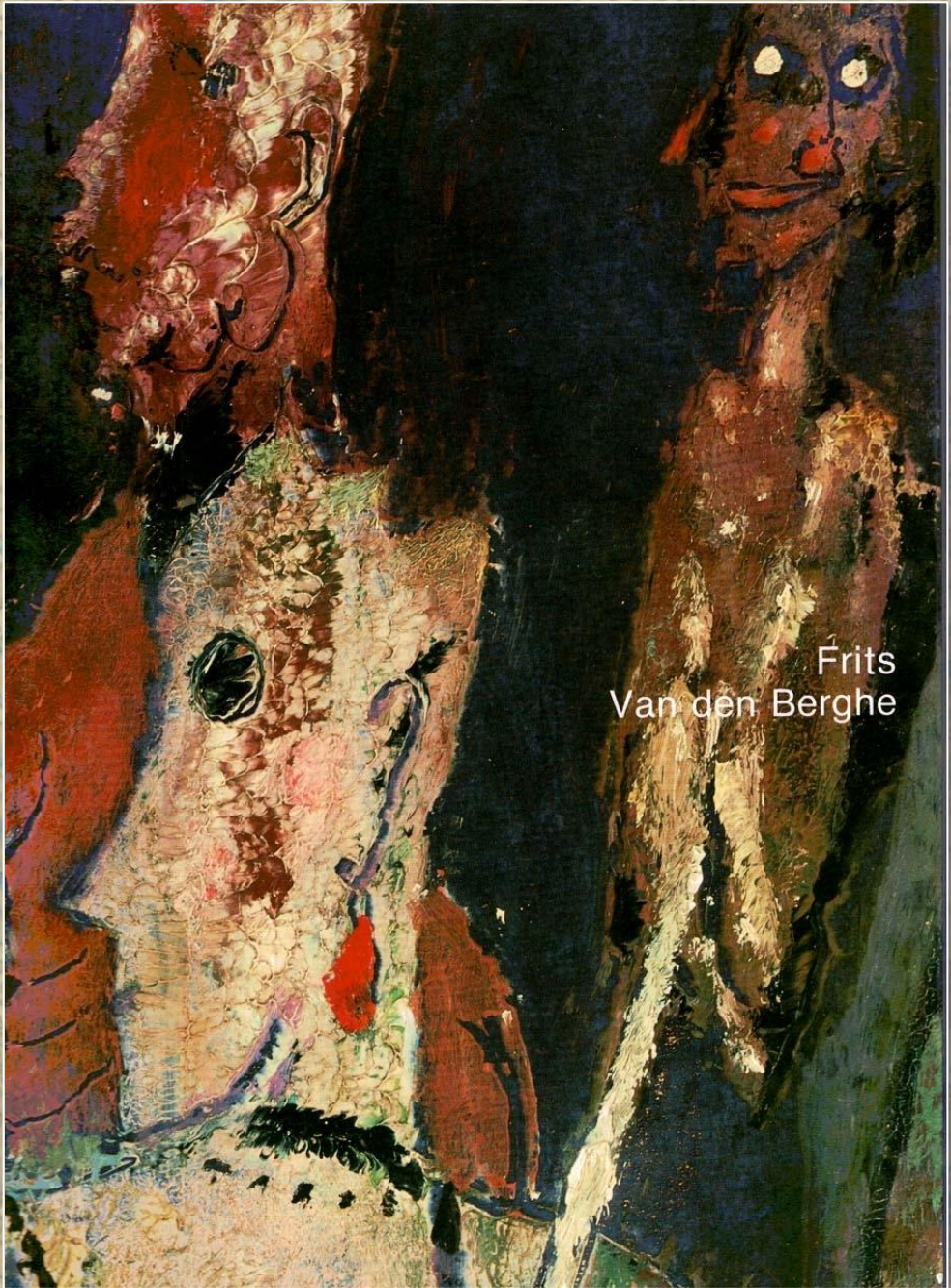
Landscape in Deurle, 1923



De zaaier - 1916  
The sower— 1916



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Frits  
Van den Berghe

Book which was published following the  
1983 Frits Van den Berghe retrospective  
organized by the City of Ghent and the Municipal Credit



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



**" Portret van mevrouw Brulez"**

of " De vrouw met de kringen om de ogen " - 1920

"Portrait of Mrs. Brulez" or "The woman with the circles around the eyes" - 1920



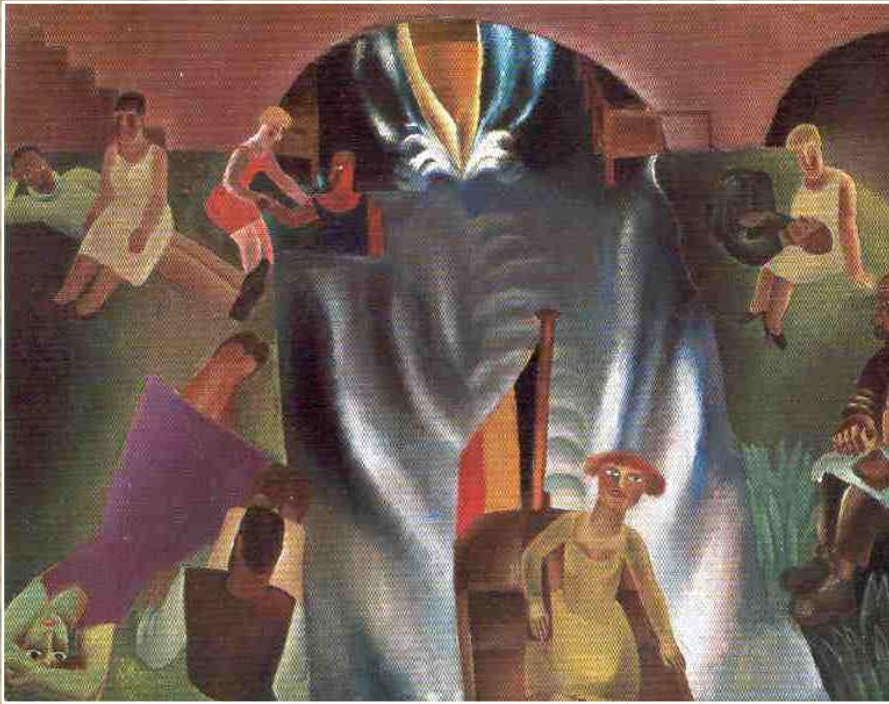
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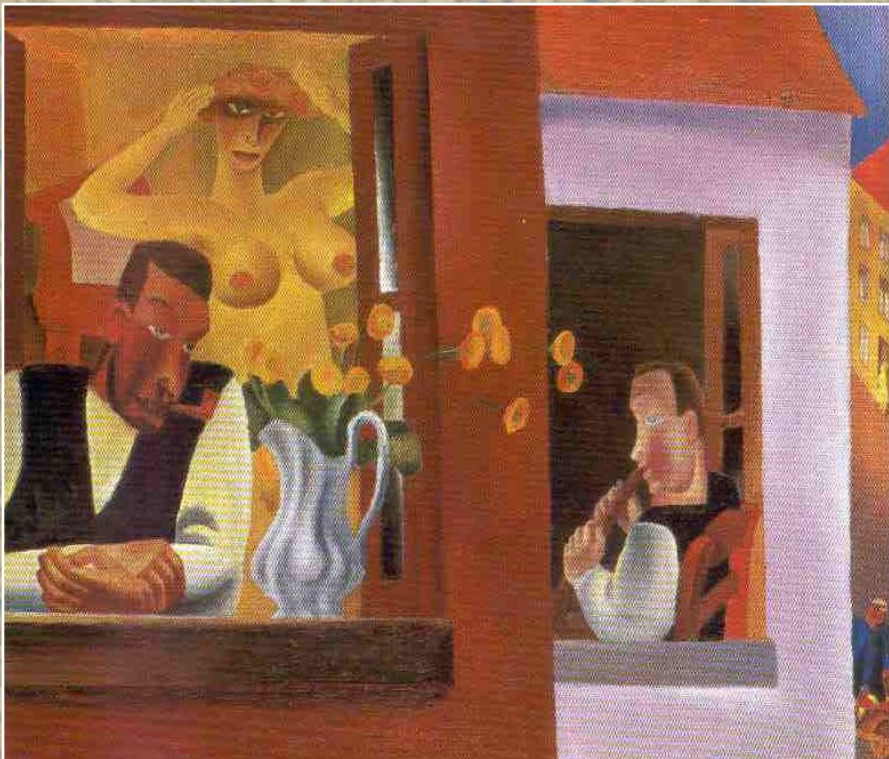
De verliefden in het dorp - 1925  
The lovers in the village - 1925



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



De oevers, of wandeling op de Leie - 1926  
The banks, or walk on the Lys - 1926



De fluitspeler - 1925  
The flute player - 1925



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Het rijk der natuur  
The realm of nature



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST

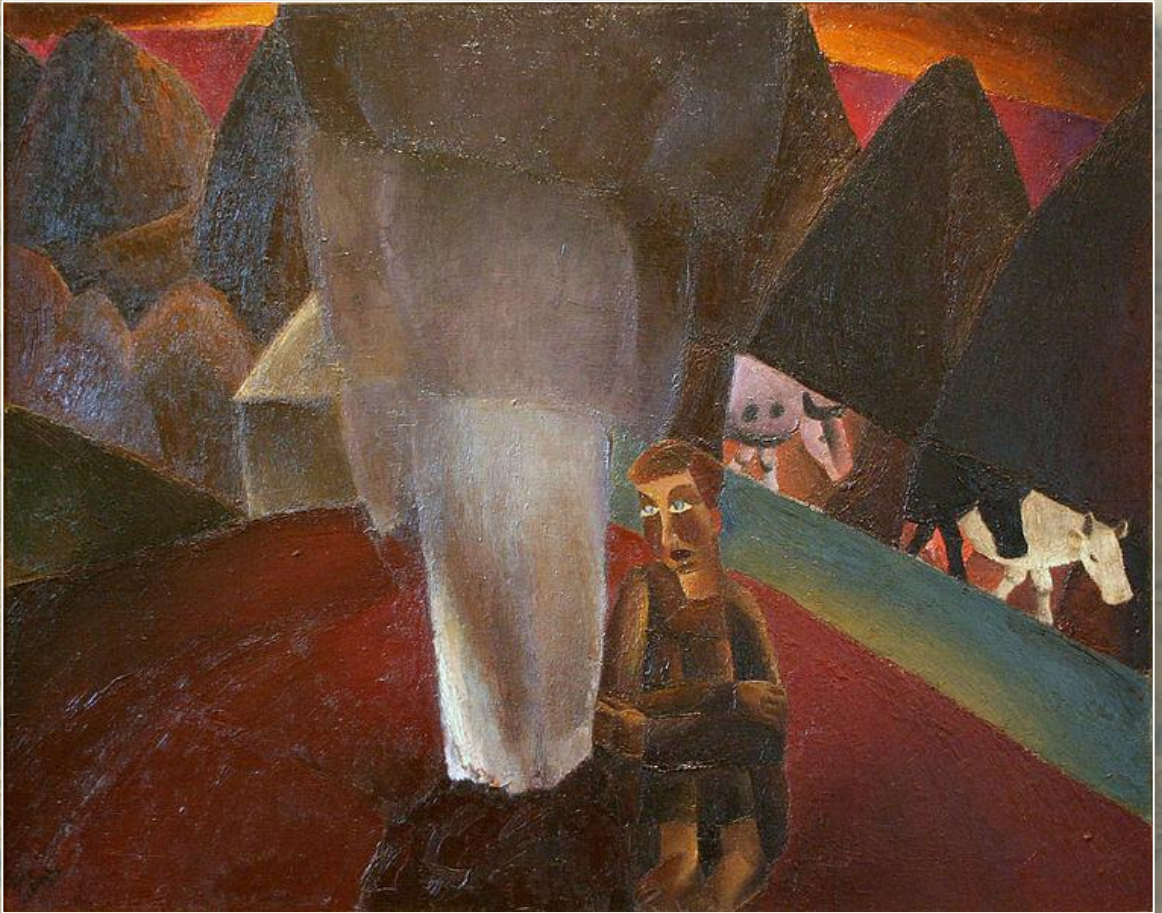


René De Clercq aan de piano,  
geschilderd door Frits van den Berghe.

René De Clercq at the piano, painted by Frits van den Berghe.



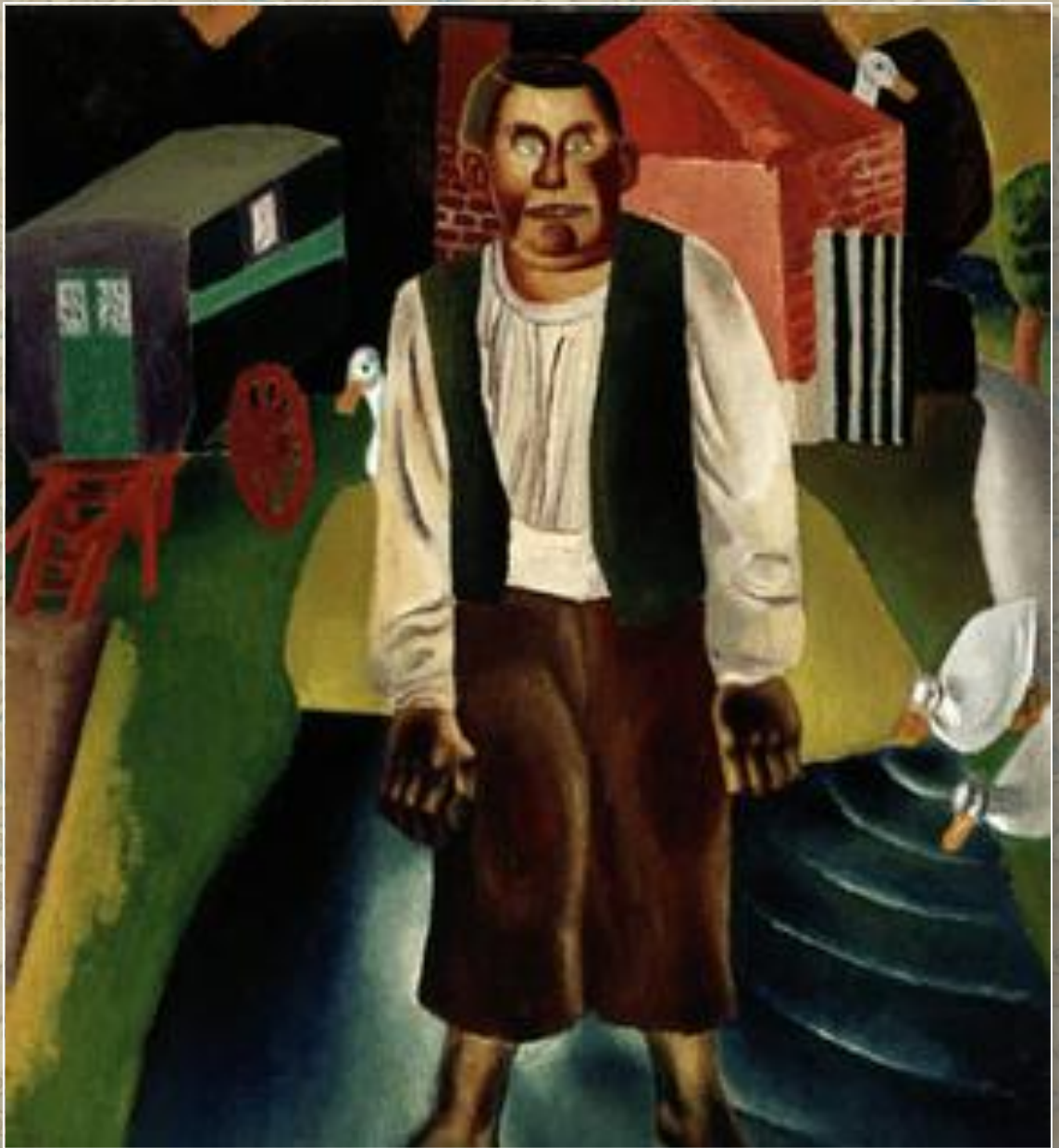
# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



The Cowherd – 1923-24  
oil on canvas



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Frits van den Berghe  
*L'idiot devant l'étang* (1926)  
The idiot in front of the pond (1926)



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



De Schaduw – 1928  
The Shadow



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



De Schepping - 1927  
Creation - 1927



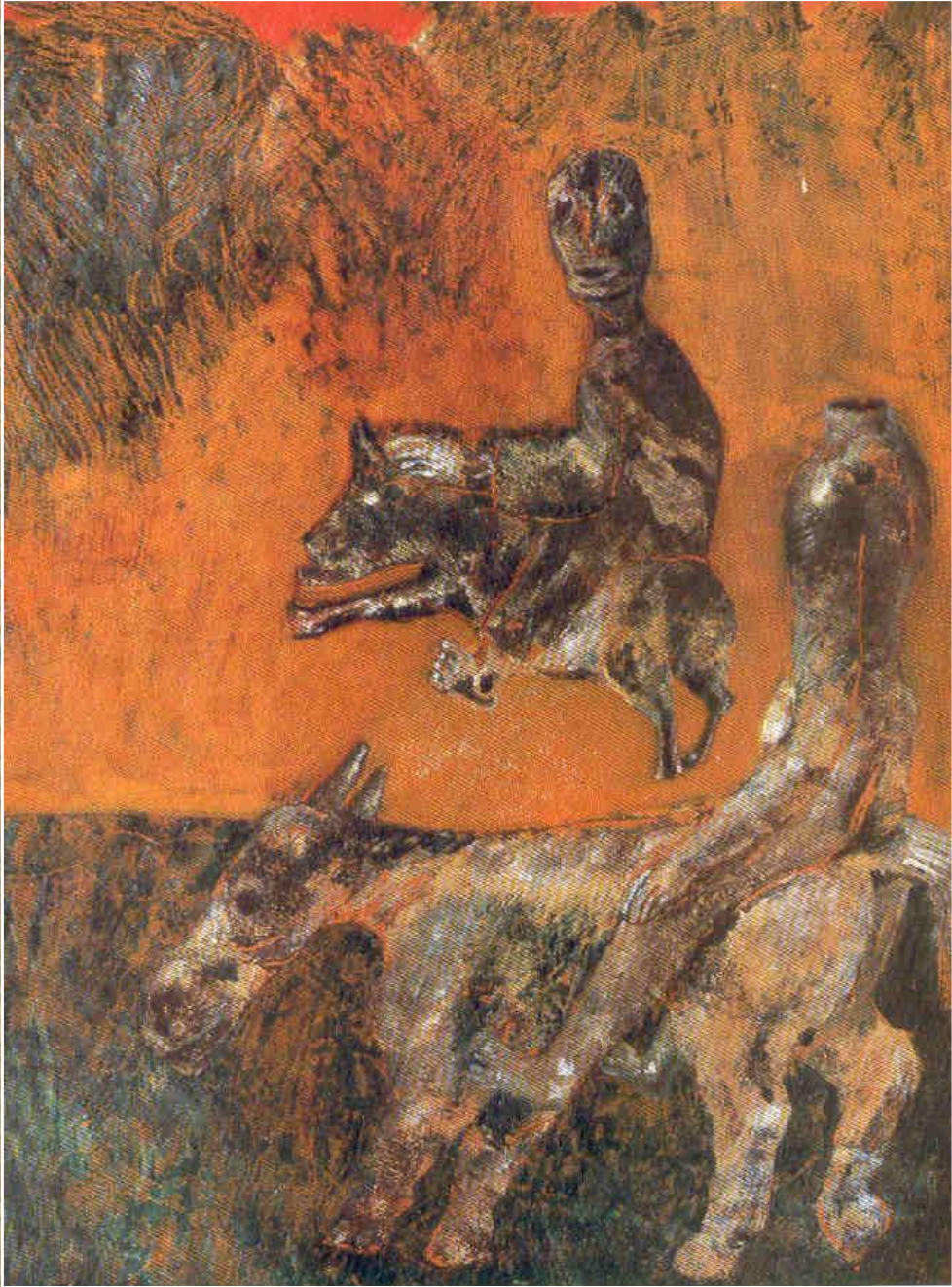
# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Idolen – 1929  
Idols - 1929



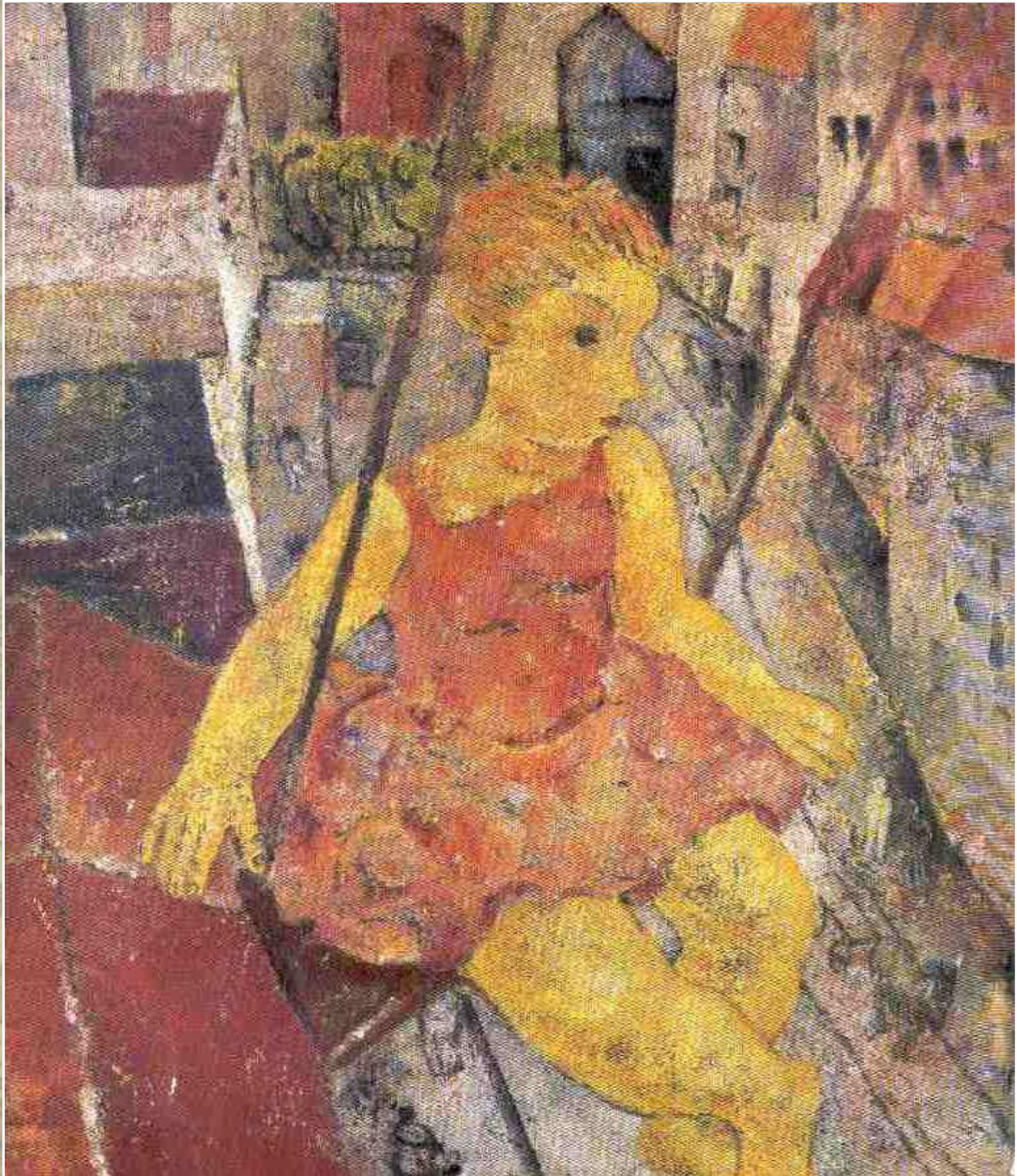
# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



De ongelijke wedstrijd - 1929  
The unequal contest - 1929



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



De schommel – 1930  
The Swing - 1930



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



De worstelaars - 1929  
The Wrestlers - 1929



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Crayon and black chalk drawing on back of letter



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



**'Paul-Gustave Van Hecke and his wife Norine'.**

One critic thought that the silvery dress of the wife seemed to pop out of the painting like a shimmering fish writhing free of the oppressive Belgian gloom.



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST



Le Miroir - Watercolor, pencil and gouache on paper. 1924-25.  
The Mirror.



# FRITS VAN DEN BERGHE - EXPRESSIONIST

## MEET THE AUTHOR - PEDRO DE LA MONTAÑA

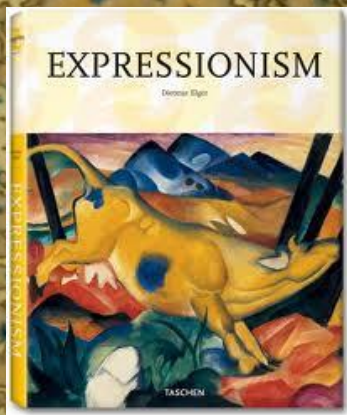
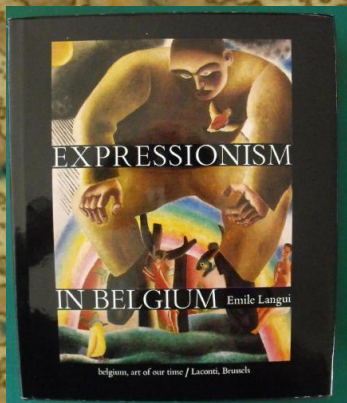


Hello!

Talk to you  
later.

van den Berghe is a common Dutch name,  
more familiar in it's anglized version: Vandenberg.  
His full name rendered into English would be  
Frits of the Mountain.  
Van den Berghe died in 1939 two months before  
the birth of Pedro de la Montaña.





END